

Book Notes: From UI To EI: Waging War on the Welfare State, by Georges Campeau

John Boadway

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Book Note

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FROM UI TO EI: WAGING WAR ON THE WEFARE STATE, BY GEORGES CAMPEAU, TRANS. BY RICHARD HOWARD. VANCOUVER: UBC PRESS, 2004. Pp. xiii + 235. \$29.95 paper.

BY JOHN BOADWAY

Goerges Campeau, in his *From UI to EI*, as translated by Richard Howard, critically examines the development and history of Canada's unemployment insurance (UI) scheme. The author's historical analysis relies heavily on economic, political, and social pressures in explaining the changing structure of the UI model. The book's theme is that Canada's UI system has been a conflicted one; what began as a social concept later became one based on individual responsibility.

The book begins with an examination of the British legal antecedents, followed by an outline of Canada's first UI Act in 1940. The author draws connections between the purposes and motivations of each country's UI legislation, noting that the purpose of Canada's 1940 Act was interpreted in the jurisprudence to be one with a social aim, that of poverty prevention. The courts continued to use this social model of UI in their decision making even after the political approach changed.

The author then details the post-world war II expansion of UI, arguing that this expansion was due to the federal government's prevailing economic wisdom. This Keynesian approach to fiscal policy allowed for UI to play an increasingly economic role, thus covering more workers. Unemployment, explains Campeau, was at that time depicted as a "collective responsibility."

The book's chronology of Canada's UI system continued through the 1970s when, the author argues, the economic and political climate weakened the previous rationale for UI. Responsibility for employment shifted to the private sector, and a free-market approach to employment was encouraged. Thus, writes the author, Canada's UI law is now closer to a private insurance model than a poverty prevention program.

The author concludes by arguing that the result of this historical process was to leave Canadians with "a degressive funding process that admits very few rights," one that reflects a neo-liberal ideology—close to that underlying the U.S. UI scheme.